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SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [CVIS](#) [PHUM](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: Refugee Admissions Referral: Azizi, Mehria

¶1. (SBU) Embassy Kabul refers Azizi, Mehria Farzhad, one of Afghanistan's first female camerawomen and filmmakers, and her family to the U.S. refugee admissions program (USRAP). Below is biographic information for the principal applicant and her dependents, a description of her persecution claim, and justification for recommending her for the USRAP.

¶2. (SBU) Principal Applicant

Name: Azizi, Mehria Farzhad
DOB: 07 May 1984
POB: Kabul, Afghanistan
Gender: Female
Marital Status: Married

Dependents:

Name: Farzhad, Mohammad Azim
DOB: 07 May 1978
POB: Kabul
Gender: Male
Marital Status: Married
Relationship to PA: Husband

Name: Farzhad, Mohammad Ali
DOB: 19 Dec 2007
POB: Kabul
Gender: Male
Relationship to PA: Son

Description of Persecution Claim

¶3. (SBU) Ms. Merhia Azizi works for AINA, an independent Afghan film company that made the State Department-funded film, "Afghanistan Unveiled." Ms. Azizi joined AINA in 2002, and she and five other young women appeared in the film both in front of and behind the camera as they interviewed women and provided commentary. The film was released internationally in 2003 to critical acclaim and nominated for an Emmy in 2005.

¶4. (SBU) Ms. Azizi claims that when she traveled to the provinces to film "Afghanistan Unveiled," she began receiving threats from male family members of women who appeared unveiled in the film. The men allegedly claimed they would find and kill her if anyone saw the faces of their female relatives. Ms. Azizi claims that phone harassment began in 2003, and in 2006 an assailant fired six or seven shots into a car in which she and her brother were sitting, luckily hitting neither of them. The police allegedly witnessed the attack but said they thought it was a toy gun. No police report was filed. After this incident, warning calls to all family members began, threatening to kill or kidnap them. Ms. Azizi claims her frequent visits to the police and Interpol's Afghanistan office failed to provide anything other than harassment by the police themselves (teasing and taunting her and dismissal of her claim as "drama"). Despite her repeated attempts to obtain documentation of her visits there, Ms. Azizi has no substantiation of her discussions with police.

15. (SBU) Ms. Azizi claims her harassers call her cell phone constantly and have detailed information of her movements. In September 2006, her brother (also working at AINA at the time) was attacked and beaten by four masked men who allegedly taunted him and said he had betrayed them for allowing his sister to work at AINA. Around the same period, Ms. Azizi sent her 17-year old brother to Iran for safety since callers claimed they would kill him "while he was sleeping." In Iran, Ms. Azizi claims he was kidnapped and held for three months, beaten frequently and tortured to reveal Ms. Azizi's phone numbers. The family eventually paid \$5,000 for his release but the attackers were never identified. The brother is now back in Afghanistan and suffering from memory loss and trauma. In 2007, Ms. Azizi continued to receive phone calls at all hours of the night, threatening to behead or dismember her brother, however, he has not been attacked since his return from Iran. Ms. Azizi says that another man appeared recently at her home with a knife, demanding her phone number but her older brother denied knowing her. She and a colleague were also threatened at knifepoint in a restaurant by the cabdriver who drove them there. Ms. Azizi's employer is aware of her allegations of harassment but has provided no protection for her and allegedly treats her as a pariah.

Background

16. (SBU) Threats against female journalists and, indeed, women of any prominence, are common in Afghanistan. Female journalists have been assassinated for dishonoring Islam or their family, or both, and all other women who worked on "Afghanistan Unveiled" have fled the country. Religious leaders are advocating strict prohibitions on women appearing on television with men.

Justification for Resettlement

17. (SBU) Ms. Azizi was part of the all-female camera crew who filmed and appeared in "Afghanistan Unveiled," a documentary funded in part by the U.S. State Department and USAID (featured prominently in the film credits). In the documentary, Ms. Azizi films Afghan women unveiled and appears unveiled herself. She even challenges the men on camera who claim that Islam requires women to cover their faces. PBS bought the film rights to "Afghanistan Unveiled" and broadcast it over 200 PBS affiliates. Since the film, Ms. Azizi has appeared in many foreign and Afghan magazines as a women's advocate and role model. She has also given many televised interviews and traveled extensively to Europe, Canada, and Australia.

18. (SBU) Ms. Azizi also has significant ties to the United States. PBS and U.S.-Afghan Women's Council member and former PBS CEO Pat Mitchell brought Ms. Azizi and four of the five young camerawomen to the Emmy Awards, accompanied by U/S Paula Dobriansky. U/S Dobriansky met Ms. Azizi again in Kabul and in Washington when Mehria participated in an ECA program. First Lady Laura Bush also welcomed several of the camerawomen to the White House. Pat Mitchell, now the President and CEO of The Paley Center for Media, continues to be a mentor to the girls.

19. (SBU) Ms. Azizi is now married and has a six-month old son who accompanies her everywhere. She claims to vary her routes to work and not tell anyone what she does, but the harassment continues, often targeted to a specific date and place, e.g., "we know your wife is in Parwan today and we are driving there now to kill her." She has supposedly communicated her concerns with her western colleagues in the past, although she has never approached the Embassy before. Given the harasser's seemingly intimate knowledge of her whereabouts and their alleged ability to track down and kidnap her brother in Iran, Ms. Azizi would most likely not be safe in Pakistan were she to apply for asylum there through UNHCR's lengthy process. It is post's view that Ms. Azizi's harassers are likely to continue their activities and possibly move to harm her or her family again. Given Ms. Azizi's very active role in "Afghanistan Unveiled," her significant association with the State Department and the Administration, and her activities to promote women's freedoms in Afghanistan, we believe that a P1 Referral is appropriate.